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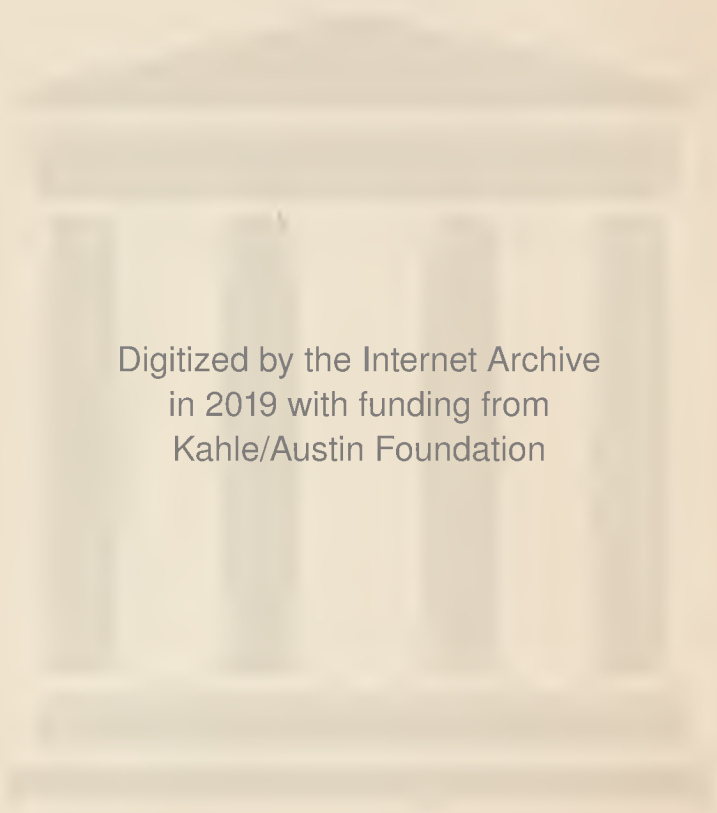
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WAR POEMS



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107, Waterloo Place.

R. E. Vernède
2nd Lieutenant, The Rifle Brigade

WAR POEMS

AND OTHER VERSES

BY
R. E. VERNÈDE

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY
EDMUND GOSSE, C.B.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction. By Edmund Gosse, C.B.	7
To C. H. V.	23
England to the Sea	24
The Call	27
The Indian Army	30
Mene, Mene	33
A Legend of the Fleet	35
The Sea is His	37
To the United States	39
The Day	41
England Marching	43
Christmas, 1914	45
Beyond the Pale	46
To Our Fallen	47
To Canada	49
The Little Army	51
The Little Sergeant	54
To F. G. S.	56
Before the Assault	58
A Petition	61
At Delville	62
A Listening Post	64

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A Trench Ditty	66
The Infantryman	68
The Sergeant	70

OTHER VERSES

The July Garden	75
To a Prince's Princess	77
A Delirium	79
Friendship	80
An Apology	81
To an English Sheep-Dog	82
To a Hippopotamus	84
The Kid and the Tanner	85

INTRODUCTION

Too much can never be said in praise of the generous beauty of the gesture with which the youngest generation of Englishmen, just emerging on the golden threshold of life, have greeted the sacrifice of their hopes and ours. It has filled our history with new and magnificent figures which will excite the enthusiasm and awaken the gratitude of our race for centuries to come. But while we admire this miraculous courage of the very youthful paladins of the war, something should still be reserved for the praise of those who had been brought face to face with the illusions of peace-time and who had, if we may say so, got into the habit of not being soldiers, but who yet, at the call of duty, sprang to the height of their disinterested patriotism. The poet whose verses we collect to-day was one of those who might well believe that their age absolved them from an active part in the profession of arms. He was, indeed, above the limit then set upon military service when the declaration of war disturbed him among his books and his flowers. Nothing in his past life had prepared him for such an activity. He

INTRODUCTION

was, as he said himself, "a dreamer," yet when the call to national duty came, he suddenly awoke, as a sleeper under the trumpet, to the utmost activity of enterprise. This is a case of the class of heroism which is most easily ignored, and which it is yet stupid and ungrateful of us to undervalue. Here we are invited to contemplate an aspect of the higher energy, even in the martial order, which is not included among the "roses and myrtles of sweet two and twenty."

Vernède's attitude towards the war is worthy of particular notice, because the nature of his occupations and tastes had led him to his fortieth year without any predilection for military matters and without any leaning to what are called "Jingo" views. But when once the problem of the attack of Germany on the democracy of the world was patent to him, he did not hesitate for a moment. He accepted, completely and finally, the situation. Nor did he ever doubt the righteousness of the cause of the Allies, nor hesitate in his conviction that it must be conducted to victory with full resolution. A few weeks before his death he wrote, in terms of scrupulous courtesy, to a "pacifist" who had asked leave to include "England to the Sea" in an anthology designed to exclude verses "which might contribute to a continuation of ill-feeling between the various nations." To this visionary, Vernède replied:—

"Not for generations to come will there be any need to fan the embers against a people whose rulers

INTRODUCTION

have found logic in brutality and have urged their own necessities as an excuse for oppression. I do not think there is much hatred out here [in France] among our fighting men, but there will be memories among those who have seen what *Kultur* has inflicted on their comrades. I believe that if we had been fighting against men less filled with this logic of devilry, the mere horrors of modern war would have brought about a peace. Whatever historians or statesmen may make of it, we are fighting against the spirit that exults in such horrors."

ROBERT ERNEST VERNÈDE was born in London on the 4th of June, 1875. He was of French extraction, representing the younger branch of a Southern family, the Vernède de Corneillans, who were driven from their estates in 1685 by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The family dropped the "de Corneillan," and settled in Java, whence the poet's grandfather, Henri Vernède, proceeded in the early part of last century, marrying an Englishwoman and becoming a British citizen. Robert Louis Stevenson mentions the ancestral castle of the Vernèdes in his *Travels with a Donkey*. The family coat of arms, for those interested in these things, is an orange-tree on a golden field with a raven clutching at an orange that falls from the tree. Essentially English in sentiment, the English branch of the Vernèdes has never ceased to pride itself on its pure French ancestry.

After passing through St. Paul's School, R. E.

INTRODUCTION

Vernède went to Oxford, where he took a classical exhibition at St. John's College. He left Oxford in 1898, and four years later he married Miss Carol Howard Fry, who survives him, and he settled down to a quiet country life at Standon in Hertfordshire. He occupied his abundant leisure in reading and writing, with a continual increase of ambition to succeed. He published several novels, *The Pursuit of Mr. Faviel*, in 1905, *Meriel of the Moors*, in 1906 ; he visited Bengal in the company of his wife, and produced on his return *An Ignorant in India*, which has received high commendation. Success came slowly to him, but he was beginning to be recognised as a writer of solid promise when the outbreak of war transfigured his whole vision of life.

It has been seen that the temperament and habits of Vernède had not in any way prepared him for fighting, and that yet, when the crisis came, he faced it at once. Though his years were mature, he was one of the earliest to dedicate himself without reserve to the service of the State, and to prepare to be a soldier. He had playfully complained that life was "humdrum"; it suddenly became perilous and splendid. One who knew him well describes the way in which Vernède faced the new conditions,—“with the airman's far-away vision”; he took “his fine headlong plunge to inspire us on our creep to death.” In more prosaic language, at the beginning of September, 1914, he enlisted as a private in a Public Schools Battalion, the 19th

INTRODUCTION

Royal Fusiliers, although he was so much above the highest limit for enlistment ; and he received a commission in the Rifle Brigade early in 1915. Before going to France, he had six months' commissioned service in the 5th Battalion of the same regiment, in the Isle of Sheppey. In France he was attached to the 3rd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, one of the four Regular battalions of that regiment.

Vernède's earliest experience of actual warfare was made in the trenches on the evening of Friday, January 7th, 1916. From that time, until his death fourteen months later, he was constantly in the thick of the fighting, save for a short time at the end of 1916 when he was at home, wounded. He was with the infantry the whole time, resisting all suggestion of transference to more comfortable billets. He started in the ill-famed Salient. One of his first turns of duty in the trenches was taken during a prolonged and very violent bombardment of our lines ; on coming out, the battalion received the thanks of the General Officer Commanding the Division. At the end of March the battalion was moved slightly south to the neighbourhood of Ploegsteert Wood. In the early autumn it went further south again to take part in the battle of the Somme. During this fighting the captain commanding Vernède's company "went sick" for a short time, and Vernède was put in temporary command. He was so acting when a shrapnel wound in the thigh, on September 1st, 1916, sent him home to England.

INTRODUCTION

After a quick recovery at Oxford and in his own Hertfordshire home, and a short time of light duty in Sheppey—having absolutely refused to let a friend in the War Office try to find him even temporary work there, for fear it might impede his return—he went back to the front in the last days of 1916. The battalion he joined, though of the Rifle Brigade, was not the one he had left: I am told that rarely happens. This was a service battalion, and in actual length of experience, apart from its quality, Vernède had probably the advantage of most of his brother officers; but the commands had all been lately filled up, so he became merely the newest-joined subaltern. He was disappointed, being full of ideas which thus had no outlet, but accepted the arrangement as natural and unavoidable, and his captain has testified to the unselfish loyalty and modesty which made it possible for others to do the same.

He was back again in very much the same region in which he had been before his wound. Later, he saw, and was deeply moved by, the ravages committed by the Germans in their retreat. On Easter Day he wrote as usual to his wife, and spoke of the summer at last coming on, and that perhaps the war would end this year and he would see his home again. Early the next morning, the 9th April, 1917, he was leading his platoon in an attack on Havrincourt Wood, when he was mortally wounded and died the same day.

The circumstances of his death repeat the story

INTRODUCTION

of a thousand such events in this prodigious war. Vernède was in charge of his platoon on the advance, and was in front with a couple of his men when they suddenly came upon a concealed enemy machine gun. He was hit, and it was immediately seen that the wound was serious. His men carried him back alive to the aid station, but he died upon the further journey. He was buried in the French cemetery at Lechelle. His friend Captain F. E. Spurling put up a cross and planted around it a large bowl of daffodil bulbs which had been the joy of the poet when they flowered in the company mess. They now, in their long sleep, watch over his rest.

He greatly endeared himself to those by whose side he worked and fought. From a sheaf of private tributes from his fellow-soldiers I am permitted to quote one or two passages. Capt. G. Tatham says :

“ We served together in the same company from November 15th [1915] to last May, and we were a very happy party, as happy, at least, as it is possible to be in such circumstances. That we were so was in no small measure due to Vernède. He was a delightful companion and an excellent man to have in a battalion,—always cool and collected in the trenches, and always ready to lighten the dull monotony of billets with his quiet sense of humour. I now remember, sadly, that we used to accuse him of making notes for a future book in which all the weaknesses of his brother officers were to stand revealed ! ”

INTRODUCTION

The late Capt. Andrew Buxton speaks of Vernède's "extraordinary bravery, over and over again undertaking and carrying through the most 'unhealthy' bits of work with all his thought for the men he was with and none for himself. He loved the N.C.O.s, and whenever any misfortune happened to one of his men, it was manifest that Vernède felt it intensely. Our time together was the most splendid imaginable, and I shall always look back on it with recollections that can never be forgotten."

Vernède's closest friend, Mr. F. G. Salter, to whom I am indebted for much of the preceding information, gives me the following impression of him :—

"In physical appearance Vernède was of rather more than average height, dark, with olive complexion ; his face very regular and oval. He was strikingly good-looking, and his movements the most graceful of any creature's I have seen. He was a good skater, swimmer, and lawn-tennis player, and could walk enormous distances, when he chose. He never seemed to change at all from what he was like at Oxford.

"His manner was quiet and reserved, or what might have seemed reserved to people first meeting him. Underneath this lay a keen observation of human nature, in all kinds and classes, and a humour which on occasion could be sarcastic. Anything pretentious or pompous was a sure target : a lesser condemnation was reserved for conduct which was not perfectly natural and easy. Except among

INTRODUCTION

intimates, he would often sit silent while others talked, and then, unexpectedly, say something from an unwonted angle which lit up the whole question. He was entirely without affectation, and certainly not disposed to put the artist on a pedestal above ordinary men. Every form of life interested him : he had the solidest stand on his mother earth. His temper was quite impossible to ruffle : I don't think in all these years I have ever once known him put out or moody. It is not surprising that he became popular with the young officers among whom he was thrown, and with his men, especially when the latter were in any sort of trouble.

“To his friends he gave a generous and never-failing sympathy. They have lost the best man they have known.

“His hatred of war was intense, and positive. He hated the cruelty it inflicts, and denied it as a test of efficiency, but his feeling went beyond that : he loved ardently the things which war destroys, the good human life of fellowship and adventure, the kindness between man and man, the ‘thousand labours under the sun.’ To him it was a clear-cut issue of right and wrong when Germany let loose this evil upon Europe. Neither did he feel any hesitation as to his own duty. The greatness of England had always been the background of his thought : now he—‘dreamer,’ as he calls himself—could serve her. He was a poor man, and enlistment meant for him the immediate cutting off of the greater part of

INTRODUCTION

his and his wife's livelihood ; it meant too, of course, subordination, as a private, to all sorts of stupid duties and persons. But he at once enlisted, and only took a commission when it had become clear that that was the greater need. He was not at all indifferent to death. He loved life, with a solid, English love ; he loved his garden, his art, his friends ; above all, he loved the wife who for all the years since their betrothal had been the inspirer and encourager of everything he did, and who was so in this decision also, and to the end. He very greatly desired to come back alive after the war. But it seemed to him that such a desire was, for the present, simply irrelevant."

Found among his papers, after his death, were the opening lines of an unfinished poem ; he had noted it as one intended to be included in a collection he was contemplating, but if ever finished, the completion remained in his head alone. The lines are as follows :

I seek new suns : I will not die ;
Earth hath not shown me half her store.

From an eloquent tribute written by another former school-fellow and friend, Mr. G. K. Chesterton, on receiving the news of Vernède's death, I quote a confirmatory passage :—

" He always remained, even in face and figure, almost startlingly young. There went with this the paradox of a considerable maturity of mind, even in

INTRODUCTION

boyhood ; a maturity so tranquil and, as it were, so solitary as to be the very opposite of priggishness. He had a curious intellectual independence ; I remember him maintaining in our little debating club, that Shakespeare was overrated ; not in the least impudently or with any foreshadowing of a Shavian pose, but rather like a conscientious student with a piece of Greek of which he could not make sense. He was too good a man of letters not to have learnt better afterwards ; but the thing had a touch of intangible isolation that surprised the gregarious mind of boyhood. He had in everything, even in his very appearance, something that can only be called distinction ; something that might be called, in the finer sense, race. This was perhaps the only thing about him, except his name and his critical temper, that suggested something French. I remember his passing a polished and almost Meredithian epigram to me in class : it was, I regret to say, an unfriendly reflection on the French master, and even on the French nation in his person ; but I remember thinking, even at the time, that it was rather a French thing to do. There was a certain noble contradiction in his life and death that there was also in his very bearing and bodily habit. No man could look more lazy and no man was more active, even physically active. He would move as swiftly as a leopard from something like sleep to something too unexpected to be called gymnastics. It was so that he passed from the English country life he loved so much, with its

INTRODUCTION

gardening and dreaming, to an ambush and a German gun. In the lines called 'Before the Assault,' perhaps the finest of his poems, he showed how clear a vision he carried with him of the meaning of all this agony and the mystery of his own death. No printed controversy or political eloquence could put more logically, let alone more poetically, the higher pacifism which is now resolute to dry up at the fountain-head the bitter waters of the dynastic wars, than the four lines that run :—

' Then to our children there shall be no handing
Of fates so vain, of passions so abhorr'd . . .
But Peace . . . the Peace which passeth under-
standing . . .
Not in our time . . but in their time, O Lord.'

" The last phrase, which has the force of an epigram, has also the dignity of an epitaph ; and its truth will remain."

To this admirable judgment I can add nothing, except to say that the great quality of Vernède's war-poems seems to me to reside in that directness of which Mr. Chesterton speaks. He is filled by a consciousness of the fine plain issues of the struggle between darkness and light. Hence, his verses emphasise our love of England, our veneration for her past, our confidence in her future, our steady and determined purpose. Moreover, he insists on keeping sharp the blade of indignation, whose edge is for ever being rubbed down by sentimentality

INTRODUCTION

Vernède indulges in no absurd diatribes or "hate-songs"; but his poems and his letters show that personal acquaintance with the dreadful accidents of his new profession had convinced him of the necessities of the moment. They had convinced him, beyond all disproof, that the peculiar Teutonic effort,—exercised, for instance, as at Arras or in Belgium,—was, to put it plainly, infamous. To punish, and for the future to prevent, such wickedness as this was the object, and the entirely sufficient object, of the self-sacrifice which had brought the farmer from Canada and the shepherd from New Zealand, and incidentally had drawn Vernède himself from his Hertfordshire garden. No doubt it is the evidence of this directness in his verses which has given them their first popularity.

EDMUND GOSSE.

July, 1917

WAR POEMS

TO C. H. V.

WHAT shall I bring to you, wife of mine,

When I come back from the war ?

A ribbon your dear brown hair to twine ?

A shawl from a Berlin store ?

Say, shall I choose you some Prussian hack

When the Uhlans we o'erwhelm ?

Shall I bring you a Potsdam goblet back

And the crest from a Prince's helm ?

Little you'd care what I laid at your feet,

Ribbon or crest or shawl—

What if I bring you nothing, sweet,

Nor maybe come home at all ?

Ah, but you'll know, Brave Heart, you'll know

Two things I'll have kept to send :

Mine honour for which you bade me go

And my love—my love to the end.

ENGLAND TO THE SEA

HEARKEN, O Mother, hearken to thy daughter !

Fain would I tell thee what men tell to me,
Saying that henceforth no more on any water
Shall I be first or great or loved or free,

But that these others—so the tale is spoken—

Who have not known thee all these centuries
By fire and sword shall yet turn England broken
Back from thy breast and beaten from thy seas,

Me—whom thou barest where thy waves should
guard me,

Me—whom thou suckled'st on thy milk of foam,
Me—whom thy kisses shaped what while they marred
me,

To whom thy storms are sweet and ring of home.

“ Behold,” they cry, “ she is grown soft and strength-
less,

All her proud memories changed to fear and fret.”

WAR POEMS

Say, thou, who hast watched through ages that are
lengthless,

Whom have I feared, and when did I forget ?

What sons of mine have shunned thy whorls and
races ?

Have I not reared for thee time and again
And bid go forth to share thy fierce embraces
Sea-ducks, sea-wolves, sea-rovers, sea-men ?

Names that thou knowest—great hearts that thou
holdest,

Rocking them, rocking them in an endless wake—
Captains the world can match not with its boldest,
Hawke, Howard, Grenville, Frobisher, Drake ?

Nelson—the greatest of them all—the master
Who swept across thee like a shooting star,
And, while the Earth stood veiled before disaster,
Caught Death and slew him—there—at Trafal-
gar ?

Mother, they knew me then as thou didst know me ;
Then I cried, Peace, and every flag was furled :
But I am old, it seems, and they would show me
That never more my peace shall bind the world.

WAR POEMS

Wherefore, O Sea, I, standing thus before thee,
Stretch forth my hands unto thy surge and say :
When they come forth who seek this empire o'er
thee,
And I go forth to meet them—on that day

God grant to us the old Armada weather,
The winds that rip, the heavens that stoop and
lour—
Not till the Sea and England sink together,
Shall they be masters ! Let them boast that
hour !

August, 1914.

THE CALL

LAD, with the merry smile and the eyes
 Quick as a hawk's and clear as the day,
You, who have counted the game the prize,
 Here is the game of games to play.
 Never a goal—the captains say—
Matches the one that's needed now :
 Put the old blazer and cap away—
England's colours await your brow.

Man, with the square-set jaws and chin,
 Always, it seems, you have moved to your end
Sure of yourself, intent to win
 Fame and wealth and the power to bend—
 All that you've made you're called to spend,
All that you've sought you're asked to miss—
 What's ambition compared with this
That a man lay down his life for his friend ?

WAR POEMS

Dreamer, oft in your glancing mind
 Brave with drinking the faerie brew,
You have smitten the ogres blind
 When the fair Princess cried out to you.
 Dreamer, what if your dreams are true ?
Yonder's a bayonet, magical, since
 Him whom it strikes, the blade sinks through—
Take it and strike for England, Princee !

Friend with the face so hard and worn,
 The Devil and you have sometime met,
And now you curse the day you were born
 And want one boon of God—to forget.
 Ah, but I know, and yet—and yet—
I think, out there in the shrapnel spray,
 You shall stand up and not regret
The life that gave so splendid a day.

Lover of ease, you've lolled and forgot
 All the things that you meant to right ;
Life has been soft for you, has it not ?
 What offer does England make to-night ?
 This—to toil and to march and to fight
As never you've dreamed since your life began ;

WAR POEMS

This—to carry the steel-swept height,
This—to know that you've played the man !

Brothers, brothers, the time is short,
Nor soon again shall it so betide
That a man may pass from the common sort
Sudden and stand by the heroes' side.
Are there some that being named yet bide ?
Hark once more to the clarion call—
Sounded by him who deathless died—
“ This day England expects you all.”

August, 1914.

THE INDIAN ARMY

INTO the West they are marching ! This is their
longed-for day

When that which England gave them they may at
last repay ;

When for the faith she dealt them, peasants and priests
and lords,

When for the love they bear her, they shall unsheathe
their swords !

Men of the plains and hill-men, men born to warrior
rôles,

Tall men of matchless ardour, small men with mighty
souls,

Rulers alike and subjects : splendid the roll-call rings :
Rajahs and Maharajahs, Kings and the sons of Kings,

Bikanir, Patiala, Ratlam and Kishangarh,
Jodhpur, who rides the leopard down, Sachin and
Cooch-Bihar,

WAR POEMS

From lands where skies are molten and suns strike
down and parch,
Out of the East they're marching, into the West they
march.

Oh little nimble Gurkhas, who've won a hundred
fights,
Oh Sikhs—the Sikhs who failed not upon the Dargai
heights,
Rajputs, against whose valour once in a younger world
Ruthless, unceasing, vainly, the Mogul's hosts were
hurled,

Grey are our Western daybreaks and grey our Western
skies
And very cold the night-watch unbroke by jackals'
cries ;
Hard too will be the waiting—you do not love to wait ?
Aye, but the charge with bayonets—they'll sound it
soon or late !

And when that charge is sounded, who'll heed grey
skies and cold ?
Not you, Sikhs, Rajputs, Gurkhas, if to one thought
you hold,

WAR POEMS

If as you cross the open, if as the foe you near,
If as you leap the trenches, this thought is very clear :

*These foes, they are not sahibs : they break the word
they plight,*

*On babes their blades are whetted, dead women
know their might,*

*Their Princes are as sweepers whom none may
touch or trust,*

*Their gods they have forgotten ; their honour trails
the dust ;*

All that they had of izzat is trodden under heel—

*Into their hearts, my brothers, drive home, drive
home the steel !*

August, 1914.

MENE, MENE

In that green land behind you
The well-loved homesteads stand
Quiet as when you left them
To spoil a little land.
And still your busy housewives
Sit knitting unafraid
And still your children play as once
The Flemish children played.

In that green land behind you
Whence you went forth to kill
Your maids await their lovers,
With hope their bosoms thrill.
Oh lips too sweet almost to kiss,
Oh eyes grown bright in vain—
So waited many a Flemish maid
Whom none shall kiss again.

WAR POEMS

In that green land behind you,
 Heard you a bugle call ?
See you in dreams a writing form
 On every homestead wall ?
What is yon cloud that grows and grows ?
 The Cossacks ride that way—
Pray that their hearts be not as yours—
 If Gods be left you, pray !

A LEGEND OF THE FLEET

SINCE Nelson went to glory
A hundred years ago
(No man can hear the story
But still it makes him glow),
There's lots of old wiseacres,
Longshoremen and headshakers
Who say, " We have none like him—
His like we'll never know ! "

And maybe they speak rightly,
For God Himself, you'd say,
Would scarce start making lightly
Another picce of clay
Filled with his high devotions,
His brain, that raced the oceans,
His heart of fire and swiftness
That won Trafalgar Day

WAR POEMS

Yet on the other hand, sirs,
 There's some folks that declare—
Strange stuff to tell on land, sirs,
 But sailor men—they'll swear—
When Nelson went to glory,
 His heart—for that's their story—
Afire he flung it to the Fleet,
 And still it's blazing there !

So when our grim, grey cruisers
 Nose out the skulking foe,
And, beggars not being choosers,
 Their guns begin to crow,
Though Nelson's gone to glory
 'Twill be the same old story—
His heart, his heart will lead us,
 And them that doubt will know.

“ THE SEA IS HIS ”

THE Sea is His : He made it,
 Black gulf and sunlit shoal
From barriered bight to where the long
 Leagues of Atlantic roll :
Small strait and ceaseless ocean
 He bade each one to be :
The Sea is His : He made it—
 And England keeps it free.

By pain and stress and striving
 Beyond the nations' ken,
By vigils stern when others slept,
 By many lives of men ;
Through nights of storm, through dawns
 Blackier than midnights be—
This Sea that God created,
 England has kept it free.

WAR POEMS

Count me the splendid captains
 Who sailed with courage high
To chart the perilous ways unknown—
 Tell me where these men lie !
To light a path for ships to come
 They moored at Dead Man's quay ;
The Sea is God's—He made it,
 And these men made it free.

Oh little land of England,
 Oh Mother of hearts too brave,
Men say this trust shall pass from thee
 Who guardest Nelson's grave.
Aye, but these braggarts yet shall learn
 Who'd hold the world in fee,
The Sea is God's—and England
 England shall keep it free.

TO THE UNITED STATES

TRAITORS have carried the word about

That your hearts are cold with the doubt that
kills.

Fools! As though you could sink to doubt;

You—whom the name of freedom thrills!

They fear lest we plead with you by our blood

To throb with England in this great fight,

Caring no whit if the cause be good,

Crying—"It's England's, account it right."

Nay but that call would be vain indeed;

Not thus do brothers to brothers speak.

We shall not plead with you—let them plead,

Whose heel is set on the necks of the weak

Let them plead who have piled the dead

League after league in that little land,

Whose hands with the blood of babes are red,

Red—while they'd grasp you by the hand.

WAR POEMS

Let them plead, if for shame they dare,
Whose honour is broke and their oaths
forsworn—
We shall know by the blood we share
The answer you cannot speak for seorn.

September, 1914.

THE DAY

How shall it break—this dawn beyond forgetting ?

Out of grey skies shall just the same rose red
Signal a day like that which ere its setting
Gave us the seas to hold—and Nelson dead ?

Then, even as now, strife filled the earth's four
quarters.

And Might seemed Right and God was chal-
lengèd ;

Then even as now upon the dim blue waters
The Fleet kept watch—the Fleet that Nelson led.

Dead is the Admiral ; all the ships he won with
Are scrapped—forgotten ; and the doubters say
Though he still lived, his skill is passed and done with
And none may tell the outcome of this day.

Since from high Heaven itself Death may come sailing
Suddenly, and from waters smooth and clear
Sharper than from a gun's mouth, Hell starts hailing,
And ere the foe be seen, the doom is near.

WAR POEMS

Aye, but remember ye when doubts come creeping
That not his scaeraft only Nelson left—
Things nobler far he gave his men in keeping
That should avail them though all else were reft—

Things that Time cannot fashion and unfashion
The fearless faith that love of freedom gives. . . .
The fire, the inextinguishable passion,
The will to die . . . so only England lives . . .

Watch an ye will and pray—no prayer forgetting—
For the brave hearts on yon dim waters rocked ;
But fear not for the end of that sun-setting—
The fire burns on—faith wins—God is not
mocked.

ENGLAND MARCHING

WINTER—it's winter, Little Greatest Country,
Black clouds keep piling on a bitter sky
And the winds are screaming up from the cruel north-
line,
Cold winds—cold hearts—winter is nigh.

Other Peoples, great ones, Little Greatest Country,
Marking all the storm-signs and the tyrants
waxing strong,
Take fear to council and sound for a retiring,
Sink on their knees and whimper "Lord, how
long?"

You have never halted, Little Greatest Country,
Though the foe ran ravening and all heav'n was
gray,
Though cowards noisily twittered of disaster,
Leaders hung back that should have shown the
way.

WAR POEMS

On through the Darkness, Little Greatest Country,

 You have kept marching the men that you bore—
Seemed their drums muffled, their trumpets were they
 silent ?—

 Ah, but the foot-beats—Hear their ceaseless roar !

Little Greatest Country, never yet went army

 Poor and so valiant, crushed and so free,
Through deadlier night, disdaining the false captains,
 Marching—marching—to Spring and Victory.

December, 1914.

CHRISTMAS, 1914

LET us forget at this sad Christmastide

All but the Babe who in his manger lay—

God's Son who came that peace might reign alway

And love be Lord. Though Him they crucified.

Aye but He died not vainly. Cruelty died

All down the ages, and the Babe held sway

In true men's hearts, so that the stronger they,

So much the more they crushed their strength and
pride.

Until a race that had forgot the Christ

Arose, saying, " Behold we are mighty men,

As once of old let Might be Right again " . . .

Oh, Babe, hath not Thy life, Thy death sufficed ?

Let us forget . . . nay let us rather wake

And strike them down for Christ's and all babes'
sake.

BEYOND THE PALE

(After reading the French evidence of the German atrocities.)

As men who, in some hideous ju-ju place,
Having found a naked ape with brutish tread
Whom once they knew, before his reason fled,
Decent and sane, a white man of their race,
Will close their eyes in horror for a space—
Then for sheer pity's sake, with no word said,
Since no word may avail, will strike him dead
And strive thereafter to forget his face :
So with these ravening brutes that once were men
A loathing world has held awhile its hand
Unable to believe such things could be,
Now, lest such baseness should be seen again,
Let it in mercy flame across their land
And sweep them to oblivion utterly

TO OUR FALLEN

YE sleepers, who will sing you ?

We can but give our tears—

Ye dead men, who shall bring you

Fame in the coming years ?

Brave souls . . . but who remembers

The flame that fired your embers ? . . .

Deep, deep the sleep that holds you

Who one time had no peers.

Yet maybe Fame's but seeming

And praise you'd set aside,

Content to go on dreaming,

Yea, happy to have died

If of all things you prayed for—

All things your valour paid for—

One prayer is not forgotten,

One purchase not denied,

WAR POEMS

But God grants your dear England
A strength that shall not cease
Till she have won for all the Earth
From ruthless men release,
And made supreme upon her
Merey and Truth and Honour—
Is this the thing you died for ?
Oh, Brothers, sleep in peace !

December, 1914.

TO CANADA

CANADA, Canada, is not thy face most fair ?

Is there a land men know fairer than thee ?

Where is heaven half so vast ? Where blows a
lovelier air ?

What are thy sons doing here o'er the sea ?

Have they forgot thy great hills and thy crystal clear
Streams and deep woods and rich fields that they
come ?

Are not their women loved ? Are not their children
dear ?

Why do they march at the roll of the drum ?

Chill are the Belgian dunes, clammy the night wind's
breath,

Always the livid mists from the meres creep ;

Who takes the roads of France marches alongside
death—

Are thy sons weary to try the last sleep ?

WAR POEMS

Ah, but thou knowest well, Canada, Canada,
Sweet's every inch of thee, dear's every call ;
Came but a cry from thee, every man's heart would
 stir . . .
Only thine honour is dearest of all . . .

And they have sworn, thy sons, when thou art
 mightier yet,
No man shall point at thee, none shall dare say,
“ When, in the war of worlds, Cruelty and Justice met,
Men of the maple hung back from the fray.”

So where the bugles call, there where the thin lines
 reel,
Far from the land where their homes and hearts
 be,
Stalwart and terrible, into the hail of steel,
Canada, lo, they are marching for thee !

THE LITTLE ARMY

It's true that hordes of British ne'er by tyrants' wills
were hurled,

Thicker than any locust swarm, to devastate the
world ;

But when those tyrants' legions passed, or painfully
withdrew,

One little Army still marched—it did at Waterloo.

No British Attila is found upon our scroll of fame—

A thing few Englishmen regret—we never liked the
name—

But where, in some Walhalla hall, the great dead
Captains meet,

It's odds if Wellington stands down or Marlborough
lacks a seat.

Why would they ? Small their armies were maybe,
but none would call

The battles they fought little ones, the victories they
won small,

WAR POEMS

Seeing that, ere they left the field, whate'er their toll
might be,
Kings had gone down and Emperors given up their
empirey.

Nay, take a map and count the spots where this
small force made shift—
Blenheim, the Douro, Quatre Bras, Alma, Quebec,
Rorke's Drift ;
Mark that long road they trudged, adown the endless
Afghan nights,
See where, at a sick hero's word, they climbed the
Abraham's Heights.

Let others count their men by hordes ! We count
them one by one—
And many a warrior doffed his shoes before John
Nicholson ;
And many a slave bowed down his head and wept to
know his doom—
When Gordon stood and faced the pack that roared
into Khartoum . . .

WAR POEMS

Oh War-lord of the Western Huns—that Army of
Sir John's—

Your legions know it, do they not? They drove it
back from Mons—

'Twas small enough . . . too small perhaps . . . the
British line *is* thin . . .

It won't seem quite so little when it's marching
through Berlin.

1915.

THE LITTLE SERGEANT

(Sergeant ——, The Rifle Brigade.)

HE was one of the Bugler lads
Born in the Army and bred also,
And they gave him the stripes that had been his dad's
For knowing what soldiers ought to know.
And then you'd see him swanky and small
Drilling grown men of twice his span,
Dressing them down and telling 'em all
That the British Army teaches a man.

Lef-right-lef—how he'd make them run—
All for their good as he let them see . . .
“It's the way the Army has always done,
Don't argy the point,” he'd say, “with me.”
Sometimes they groused, but mostly they laughed—
For there wasn't a job but he bore the brunt,
And when the time came, there was never a draft
Smarter than his when he went to the Front.

WAR POEMS

Somewhere in France on a night of drench . .

When their guns had pounded the line to hell
The Germans rushed what had been a trench

And the Sergeant's men and the Sergeant fell.
Light in some Boche I'm sure he'd let

Before they could count him as reached full-stop :
And if there was breath in him, then I'll bet
He told 'em why England would come out top.

Swanky and small and full of guts—

I wonder, now that he's out of the fight,
Down what dark alleys his small ghost struts
Giving his men " Lef-right—lef-right " .

There where the darkening shadows fall

I think I can hear him chanting slow—
" The British Army's the best of all,
Don't argy the point—I ought to know."

TO F. G. S.

(“ *Seriously wounded.*”)

PEAKS that you dreamed of, hills your heart has
climbed on,

Never your feet shall climb, your eyes shall see :
All your life long you must tread lowly places,
Limping for England, well—so let it be.

We know your heart’s too high for any grudging,
More than she asked, you gladly gave to her :
What tho’ it’s streets you’ll tramp instead of snow-
fields,
You’ll be the cheeriest, as you always were.

Yes, and you’ll shoulder all our packs—we know you—
And none will guess you’re wearied night or day—
Yes, you’ll lift lots of lame dogs over fences,
Who might have lifted you, for that’s your way.

WAR POEMS

All your life long—no matter—so you've chosen.

Pity you ? Never—that were waste indeed—

Who up hills higher than the Alps you loved so

All your life long will point the way and lead.

BEFORE THE ASSAULT

If thro' this roar o' the guns one prayer may reach

Thee,

Lord of all Life, whose mercies never sleep,

Not in our time, not now, Lord, we beseech Thee

To grant us peace. The sword has bit too deep.

We may not rest. We hear the wail of mothers

Mourning the sons who fill some nameless
grave :

Past us, in dreams, the ghosts march of our brothers

Who were most valiant . . . whom we could not
save

We may not rest. What though our eyes be holden,

In sleep we see dear eyes yet wet with tears,

And locks that once were, oh, so fair and golden,

Grown grey in hours more pitiless than
years.

WAR POEMS

We see all fair things fouled—homes love's hands
built

Shattered to dust beside their withered vines,
Shattered the towers that once Thy sunsets gilded,
And Christ struck yet again within His shrines

Over them hangs the dust of death, beside them
The dead lie countless—and the foe laughs still ;
We may not rest, while those cruel mouths deride
them,
We, who were proud, yet could not work Thy will.

We have failed—we have been more weak than these
betrayers—
In strength or in faith we have failed ; our pride
was vain.

How can we rest, who have not slain the slayers ?
What peace for us, who have seen Thy children
slain ?

Hark, the roar grows . . . the thunders reawaken—
We ask one thing, Lord, only one thing now :
Hearts high as theirs, who went to death unshaken,
Courage like theirs to make and keep their vow.

WAR POEMS

To stay not till these hosts whom mercies harden,
 Who know no glory save of sword and fire,
Find in our fire the splendour of Thy pardon,
 Meet from our steel the mercy they desire. . . .

Then to our children there shall be no handing
 Of fates so vain—of passions so abhorr'd . . .
But Peace . . . the Peace which passeth understand-
 ing . . .
Not in our time . . . but in their time, O Lord.

December, 1916.

A PETITION

All that a man might ask, thou hast given me,
England,

Birth-right and happy childhood's long heart's-
ease,

And love whose range is deep beyond all sounding
And wider than all seas.

A heart to front the world and find God in it,
Eyes blind enow, but not too blind to see
The lovely things behind the dross and darkness,
And lovelier things to be.

And friends whose loyalty time nor death shall weaken,
And quenchless hope and laughter's golden store ;
All that a man might ask thou hast given me, England,
Yet grant thou one thing more :

That now when envious foes would spoil thy splendour,
Unversed in arms, a dreamer such as I
May in thy ranks be deemed not all unworthy,
England, for thee to die.

AT DELVILLE

At Delville I lost three Sergeants—

And never within my ken
Had one of them taken thought for his life
Or cover for aught but his men.

Not for two years of fighting

Through that devilish strain and noise ;
Yet one of them called out as he died—
“ I’ve been so ambitious, boys ” . . .

And I thought to myself, “ Ambitious ! ”

Did he mean that he longed for power ?
But I knew that he’d never thought of himself
Save in his dying hour.

And one left a note for his mother,

Saying he gladly died
For England, and wished no better thing . .
How she must weep with pride.

WAR POEMS

And one with never a word fell,
Talking's the one thing he'd shirk,
But I never knew him other than keen
For things like danger and work.

Those Sergeants I lost at Delville
On a night that was cruel and black,
They gave their lives for England's sake,
They will never come back.

What of the hundreds in whose hearts
Thoughts no less splendid burn ? . . .
I wonder what England will do for them
If ever they return ?

A LISTENING POST

THE sun's a red ball in the oak
And all the grass is grey with dew,
Awhile ago a blackbird spoke—
He didn't know the world's askew.

And yonder rifleman and I
Wait here behind the misty trees
To shoot the first man that goes by,
Our rifles ready on our knees.

How could he know that if we fail
The world may lie in chains for years
And England be a bygone tale
And right be wrong, and laughter tears?

Strange that this bird sits there and sings
While we must only sit and plan—
Who are so much the higher things—
The murder of our fellow man. . .

WAR POEMS

But maybe God will cause to be—

Who brought forth sweetness from the strong—

Out of our discords harmony

Sweeter than that bird's song.

A TRENCH DITTY

WHEN the war is over an' the fun is wearin' thin
Of brightly doin' goosesteps down the alleys of Berlin,
I'll find some German ulan, twist 'is 'elmet off 'is 'ead,
An' throw 'im my puttees (what's left) to wear around
instead.

And I'll march into the station and address the
bookin'-clerk :

“ Ein billet for old England, look sharp, you frightful
Turk.

“ For I've had enough of Boches and I've shot a
handsome few—

Look sharp, you ruddy Strafer, or I may be shootin'
you.”

'E'll find a ticket fast enough, an' fust-class I'll go
back

With my feet upon the cushions an' my rifle in the
rack.

WAR POEMS

An' when I gets to England, why, I'll marry some
sweet maid

An' tell 'er 'ow we crossed the Rhine an' what the
Prussians paid.

Every night, for luck, I'll drink afore I go to bed
A pint from out that 'elmet that once squeezed the
ulan's 'ead.

And on the Kaiser's birthday I will send, to keep 'im
keen,
A card with " God strafe England " on and " Wot
pricc St. Heleen ? "

When the war is over, that's the kind o' course I'll
steer—

But it ain't quite over yet, my lad, so 'eave that
sandbag 'ere !

THE INFANTRYMAN

I wish I 'ad entered the Navy—

It's damp when the decks are a-wash ;
But the 'appy A.B., unlike you and me,
Ain't always knee-deep in the slosh.

I wish I 'ad signed as a bird-man—

'Taint nice to fall outer the sky ;
But 'e 'as got the fun of observing a 'Un
Afore he gets nicked in the eye.

I wish I 'ad gone for the cavalry—

There's yourself and a 'orse to keep neat ;
But it must save some trouble if your 'orse does the
double
When you're launched on a ruddy retreat.

I wish I 'ad tried anti-aircraft—

It's 'ard to get off your armehair
When a Zeppelin blows by ; but I'd 'ave a good try
To drill a thick 'ole in the air.

WAR POEMS

I wish I 'ad joined the Staff Collidge—

They work at the juice of a pace
Drorin' maps—reg'lar rippers—fetchin' generals their
slippers ;

But you can use yer brains at the base.

I wish I'd applied for munitions—

You should see me do 'alf-weekly spells ;
No unions I'd worry by bein' in a hurry—
No—I'd get the V.C. making shells.

But I've been and entered the infantry,

And I lives like a eel in the slosh—
“ Dam fool ! ” did you say, lad ? Well, any ole way,
lad,

It's we that gets quits with the Boche.

THE SERGEANT

THE Sergeant 'as 'is uses—

I used to doubt of it—

'E did not like the way I washed,

'Is 'ead seemed bulged a bit.

My arms drill seemed to 'urt 'im,

'E'd swear and close 'is eyes ;

An' when I 'ad no time to shave

'E would not sympathise.

At 'ome in good old England

When dealin' with recruits

'E seemed to 'ide his better self—

If they 'ad dirty boots.

But in this trench a-sitting

All crouched upon my joints

I do not mind admitting

The Sergeant 'as 'is points.

WAR POEMS

'E's just been round explainin'
That jumping up to see
If shells is going to burst your way
Is waste of energy.
Shells, though you can't believe it,
Aren't always aimed at you,
But snipers if they see your 'ead
Will put a bullet through.

His words about the Boches
Is also comforting—
'E says as good a shot as me
Could do a dozen in.
An' if it came to baynits,
I'd easy stick a score
The way I fight—I never knew
'E thought me smart before.

“ An' anyway,” 'e says, “ Lad ,
Mind this, we're goin' to win :
It's no use thinkin' gloomy thoughts
Whatever fix you're in.

WAR POEMS

Suppose we did get outed—

England would not forget.

And where's the man that is a man

That would not die for that ? ”

August, 1916

OTHER VERSES

THE JULY GARDEN

It's July in my garden ; and steel-blue are the globe
thistles

And French grey the willows that bow to every
breeze ;

And deep in every currant bush a robber blackbird
whistles

“ I'm picking, I'm picking, I'm picking these ! ”

So off I go to rout them, and find instead I'm gazing
At clusters of delphiniums—the seed was small
and brown,

But these are spurs that fell from heaven and caught
the most amazing

Colours of the welkin's own as they came hurtling
down.

And then some roses catch my eye, or maybe some
Sweet Williams

Or pink and white and purple peals of Canterbury
bells,

WAR POEMS

Or pencilled violas that peep between the three-
leaved trilliums

Or red-hot poker all aglow or poppies that cast
spells—

And while I stare at each in turn I quite forget or
pardon

The blackbirds—and the blackguards—that keep
robbing me of pie ;

For what do such things matter when I have so fair a
garden,

And what is half so lovely as my garden in July ?

Standon,

July, 1914.

TO A PRINCE'S PRINCESS

WHAT sorer fate shall one win in the world
Than to be lowered from Love's first estimate,
To see her heart grow cold, her brows elate
Questioning, and lips with scorn a little curled ;
Then on her cheeks the blushing banners furled
That told of Love's alliance, and—too late—
Th' irrevocable guest-gifts alternate
Into the ebb-tide of oblivion hurled ?
Not wittingly, O Sweet Heart, did I seem
Larger than my real self ; if it were so,
Only in thy light of splendour did I glow
So splendid as to earn thy dear esteem ;
And if the dream is gone and I must go,
Remember that I loved—and did not dream.
Who is your like of all that Grimm portrayed ?
Is Lovely Locks a lady of his pen ?
Or would you play at Princess Scorn-the-men,
Who, to an hateful goblin's power betrayed,
Was rescued by a Prince's magic blade ?
Or may be you are Beauty, as I deemed then
When first you came into my wondering ken,

WAR POEMS

Beauty, a tennis-playing English maid ?

I care not which you be, for all, at last,
Were won to look upon the proper man,
Beauty and Lovely Locks, the unsurpassed,
And the fair Scorner, sick of Caliban :
Aye, loved so much at last that none grew paler
To find their Prince was, may be, but a tailor

O happy times, when lovers' only need
Was fairy godmother or magic sword,
Or tablecloth that spread a sumptuous board !
Whene'er the Prince expressed a wish to feed ;
When waiters were invisible and unfee'd,
When ocean was no wider than a ford
To seven-league boots, and mangy scrips could breed
Of gold an unimaginable horde.

What Prince to-day can carve a dragon's shank
And in a flying trunk without a fear
Elope with the dear lady of his heart ?
Now at a ledger he must ply his part
And wearily, in some suburban bank,
Weigh Love against a hundred pounds a year.

A DELIRIUM

“ So this young life is gone from us—God send
Peace to his soul ”—(Amen !)—“ and we that
grieve

Some little consolation may conceive
In dwelling on the days that death made end,
How stainless ” (Seventy-times seven did I offend),
“ How full of splendid promise, should he live,
(Kind lips that lie, what promise did I give ?)
How well-beloved ! ”—(Thank God, I had a friend).

I on the wings of some tumultuous night
Adown unceasing silences, along
Wastes where wide-eyed deliriums sink and swell,
By crazy shores and seas that circle wrong,
Bodiless, mindless, without voice or sight,
Speed to the maze and madnesses of Hell

FRIENDSHIP

I HAD a friend, and so we went together,
Merry and armed for every kind of weather ;
Far was the road, but tired no man could find us,
We laughed at the hills, so soon they dropped
behind us.

I had a friend—yet not long had we started
When we fell out, and in our anger parted :
The clouds dipped down ; the mountains rose to
screen him.

Oh, passers-by, long years I have not seen him !

Far is the road, and always it is lonely.

I am a man, and therefore march I . . . only
It lures me not—the goal for which we started ;
I seek my friend—my friend from whom I parted.

AN APOLOGY

LISTEN ! I also have a lady fair,
Whose praise in many a passionate rhyme should
ring,
Were I not weak, for all love's licensing,
The wonder of her beauty to declare ;
And while your lady's loveliness you blare,
I tremble lest my notes fail on the string,
Lest men that hear me, question, wondering,
“ Was't beauty that inspired so poor an air ? ”
Yet when all songs are sung, all praises told,
And you demand with your last proudest tone
Men's verdict—is the prize for his or mine ?—
I shall but show my Love, saying “ Behold,
What song shall match her ? ” And all men shall
own
Your words less weak, my Lady more divine.

TO AN ENGLISH SHEEP-DOG

OLD Dog, what times we had, you, she and I,
Since first you came and with your trustful air
Blundered into her lap—a valiant, shy,
 Small tub-shaped woolly bear.

What lovely days we had ; how fast they flew
In hill-side ramblings, gallopings by the sea :
You grew too large for laps but never grew
 Too large for loyalty.

We have known friends who living passed away—
Your faith no man could turn, no passion kill ;
Even when Death called, you would scarce obey
 Until you knew our will.

Out in the fields I bore you in my arms,
Dear Thick-coat, on your grave the grasses spring ;
But He that sees no sparrow meets with harms
 Hath your soul's shepherding.

OTHER VERSES

And will that King who knows all hearts and ways
Kennel you where the winds blow long and fair
That you who ever loathed the warm still days
May snuff an upland air ?

And will He let you scamper o'er the meads
Where His hills elose their everlasting ranks,
And show you pools that mirror gray-green reeds
To cool your heaving flanks ?

And will He feed you with good things at even,
Bringing the bowl with His own hands maybe ?
And will you, hunting in your dreams in Heaven,
Dream that you hunt with me ?

Yes, you will not forget ; and when we come,
What time or by what gate we may not tell,
Hastening to meet our friend that men called dumb
Across the ditch of Hell,

You'll hear—you first of all—oh, strong and fleet,
How you will dash, an arrow to the mark !
Lord, but there'll be deaf angels when we meet—
And you leap up and bark !

TO A HIPPOPOTAMUS

Lincs written in dejection on seeing a River-horse.

A Fragment

BEAST, that waddlest in the ooze
Where Mid-Afrie rivers lose
Sight of the sheer hills they left
In silvery leaps from eleft to eleft,
But not yet with gathering roll
Have espied their final goal—
That great sea which we and they
Must be mingled with some day—
Beast, that, in this midway slime,
Passest a primæval time,
Say, what fancy did give birth
To thy super-monstrous girth ?
Did the Devil think it well
To hoist thee up one day from hell,
So that the crystal streams might be
Churned with thy vast turbidity ?
Or did he think—To stay a flood
This nightmare horse is very good,
Seeing that with his gulf-like mouth
He could drink ocean to a drouth ?

THE KID AND THE TANNER

A WHITE kid on a village green,
Imagining itself unseen,
Sported in such a graceful manner
It caught th' attention of a Tanner.

The Tanner watched, and mused, and said :
“ To see you prancing on your head
Some foolish folk, oh milk-white kid,
Would very gladly pay a quid.

“ To me it seems a sort of shame
That one so young should—for a game—
Without a thought of what is meet,
Render himself too tough to eat.”

The kid replied : “ But, Mr. Tanner,
It's lovely playing in this manner ;
Why should I then, my young life spoiling,
Cease—to become more fit for boiling ? ”

The Tanner frowned : though fairly mild,
Such heedless language made him wild—

WAR POEMS

Or, as he would himself allege,
“ Set all his moral self on edge.”

“ Each kid,” he cried, “ by Nature’s laws,
And Man’s, subserves some Higher Cause—
Not merely its own goatish pleasure—
And ought to learn to be a treasure.

“ Now you’ll be useless for the pot,
And far too gambolsome—God wot—
To draw along at nursemaid’s pace
A goat-cart in a watering-place.”

The kid believing that this view
From one so serious must be true,
First wept, then said if it knew how
’Twould be a better goat from now.

The Tanner mused—he wished to aid
A helpless creature that had strayed ;
He mused for quite a lengthy spell—
He wished to aid himself as well.

“ Really I hardly know what you,”
He said at last, “ are fit to do.
Stay—in my tannery at least
Your skin could be preserved, poor beast,

OTHER VERSES

“ Nay, more, if you will be advised
You can become immortalized,
And though from you ’twill have to sever
Your skin may gambol on for ever.”

“ Dear Mr. Tanner,” straight replied
The wondering kid, much gratified,
“ I find it very hard, believe me,
To think my ears do not deceive me.

“ For how, dear Mr. Tanner, how
Can that same skin I’m wearing now—
Shorn from my frame so lithe and taper—
Continue, as you say, to caper ? ”

The Tanner smiled—all business men
Enjoy a whimsy now and then,
And chiefly when th’ indulging of it
May cause a gain—not loss—of profit.

The Tanner smiled and cleared his throat,
And said on quite a merry note :
“ Know, kid, a nymph as gay as you
Requires a shoe, or rather two.

WAR POEMS

“ Your skin, once tanned and heeled and soled,
And lacquered to the tint of gold,
Will just suffice to make those slippers—
Size Number 4, to fit her flippers.

“ Thus, then, when you are dead and gone,
Still will a kid go eapering on,
Or rather, 'neath her skirts will glide
Two twinkling kidlets side by side.”

The kid, persuaded in this manner,
Gladly accompanied the Tanner,
And entering his odorous portal
With great despatch became immortal.

MORAL

’Tis better, Kids, to frisk and frivol
Than to take counsel of the Devil—
Even though he has the business manner
And staid appearance of a Tanner.

THE END



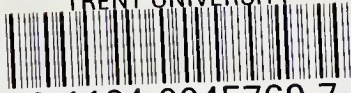
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